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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health

Statement submitted by China NGO Network for International Exchanges, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

We applaud the decision to take "implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health" as the theme for the annual ministerial review to be held by the Economic and Social Council in Geneva in July 2009. Public health is of global concern and is one of the issues highlighted and emphasized by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Three of the eight Millennium Development Goals, namely, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases, are directly related to public health.

Despite progress in public-health programmes, situations are not all bright across the world due to multiple factors such as different economic development levels, historical background and cultural conventions. In many countries and regions, there is still a serious shortage of medical services and public-health awareness. Health care for women and children is still depressingly far off. While conventional infectious diseases are still spreading in some areas, new epidemics are cropping up now and then and some chronic, occupational and endemic diseases are menacing the physical and mental well-being of the population. Bad habits and unwholesome ways of life such as smoking, unhealthy diet and lack of hygiene are still rife among many people. While the welfare public-health system is being stretched to its limits, the market mechanism has been proved not to be the right medicine. The current world financial and economic crises pose a new hurdle to further promotion of health services.

We believe that every human being has the right to basic public-health services including health information and education. Heightened health awareness and better health facilities are important guarantees for quality life and attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. To realize the Millennium Development Goals by raising public-health awareness and making people healthier in body and mind are not only an urgent task for developing countries but also a common challenge facing the whole international community. Health promotion, education and publicity campaigns are important means to raise public health awareness for all stakeholders.

We strongly recommend:

The United Nations, which has an irreplaceable role to play in promoting global public-health endeavours and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, should take reinforced steps to enhance dialogues between the South and the North, facilitate South-South cooperation, build more platforms of exchanges and encourage global partnership for development, all with a view to achieving the health-related goals set in the Millennium Development Goals.

The World Health Organization, as the only health agency in the United Nations system shouldering the responsibility of guiding and coordinating global health policies and efforts,

* Issued without formal editing.

should encourage information dissemination, experience sharing and technology transfer, seek to install a permanent global mechanism for disease prevention, control and monitoring, work to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases, prevent and control outbreaks of new pandemics like severe acute respiratory syndrome and avian influenza, and take actions to deal with other public-health problems such as tobacco use and alcoholism.

Governments should honour their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals and take it as a priority goal of national development to ensure equal access to basic public-health services for all. They should map out people-centred public-health policy strategies and increase budgetary input in national public-health programmes to meet the targets for sustainable development of the health-care system, strengthen capacity-building in education, publicity and other public health-related undertakings and show special favour to rural areas and underprivileged people. State medical insurance coverage should be further extended to the overall population.

The private sector should develop a greater sense of corporate social responsibility and ethics and fulfil its due obligations by supporting the efforts to uplift public-health awareness and literacy. Pharmaceutical companies, in particular, should strictly follow the rules and regulations and produce safe drugs accessible to and affordable by all the people.

The mass media, by taking advantage of new technologies — especially information and communications technologies — for optimum mobilization and utilization of resources, should make the best of their special edge in publicity to bring more health knowledge to the people and make them more health-conscious.

The civil society, with a multitude of comparative advantages, can serve as an important force in disseminating knowledge of health and for achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals. UN-NGO-IRENE should be encouraged to strengthen its position as a platform from which to coordinate and assist both national and regional non-governmental organizations in taking concrete actions for global health despite the current financial and economic difficulties.

People of the world, particularly those in less developed countries, are the main actors in striving for the health-related Millennium Development Goals. With due respect for different cultural backgrounds, ethnic traditions and social customs, people around the world should be fully motivated and mobilized to involve themselves in the efforts of raising public-health awareness and consciousness, and discarding unhealthy habits and lifestyles.

Being convinced that the right to public-health services constitutes part of the basic human rights, it is our common aspiration to see a world of harmony where people enjoy good health, and it is our joint mission to make it happen. China's non-governmental organizations welcome and support the undergoing reform of the national medical system away from a profit-seeking to a people-oriented policy. We know it is no easy task for a country with 1.3 billion

people, but a Government that holds the people in its heart should do it, must do it and can do it. We urge the Government of China to work more closely with the people and the medical workers and take resolute measures to ensure success. We are prepared to make relentless efforts for the betterment of public health in partnership with the Government, the private sector, the international community and other stakeholders in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.